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G E N E R A L S E R V I C E S A D M I N I S T R A T I O N
National Archives and Records Service
Washington 25, D. C.

February 10, 1955

GSA Declassification/Release Instructions on File

Lt. General C. P. Cabell
Deputy Director
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear General Cabell:

The Federal Records Center, St. Louis, Missouri, holds more than 350,000 cubic feet of civilian personnel folders and related records, pertaining to almost all the individuals who have been employed by the Federal Government since before 1900, and have been separated from this employment.

After the employee has been separated from the Government, the chief uses to which the records of his employment are put relate to subsequent re-employment and to retirement claims. When use of the records for these purposes has been completed, with relatively minor exceptions it does not appear that the records have sufficient historical or research values to warrant their further preservation.

Attached is a proposed revision of General Records Schedule 1, item 1, covering civilian personnel folders, which will have the effect of authorizing disposal of the records when their values for re-employment and retirement have been exhausted.

Before submitting this schedule to the Congress, we would appreciate a statement from you as to whether the investigative and other work of the Central Intelligence Agency would be impeded if the personnel folders were destroyed after the periods of time proposed in the schedule.

Sincerely yours,

Herbert E. Angel
Director
Records Management Division

Enclosure

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GENERAL RECORDS SCHEDULE 1

Civilian Personnel Records

Revised Item 1:

Personnel Folders excluding (a) folders or group of folders selected by the National Archives; (b) folders covering periods of employment terminated prior to January 1, 1921; and (c) papers on the so-called "temporary" side of the folder, which are authorized for disposal by General Records Schedule 1, item 11.

- (1) 75 years after birth of employee or 60 years after date of earliest document in the personnel file if date of birth cannot be ascertained, provided employee has been separated or retired for at least 2 years; or
- (2) 5 years after death of employee, whichever is sooner.

The Official Personnel Folder, promulgated in 1947 by the Federal Personnel Manual (R1 35-38), is considered to be the official record documenting employment history. The documents filed on the right side of the folder, which "travels" with the employee throughout his Federal career, comprise papers which give legal force and effect to appointments and all other personnel transactions, and which reflect minimum data on job performance. After carefully considering the various values inherent in these folders, an Ad Hoc Committee on the Disposition of Personnel Folders, consisting of representatives of the Civil Service Commission, the General Accounting Office, the Budget Bureau, and the General Services Administration, reported to the Administrator of General Services on December 31, 1952, that the folders did not have sufficient value to warrant preservation indefinitely beyond the time they were required for adjudication of retirement claims.

Executive Order 10561 of September 13, 1954, designated Official Personnel Folders as records of the Civil Service Commission, but comparable folders of employees occupying positions excepted from the competitive civil service are records of the employing agencies. These records have the same values as do Official Personnel Folders, and they are therefore included in the coverage of this item.

Any historical value that personnel records as a class may have relates primarily to the individual, not in his capacity as a Federal employee, but rather because of his position in the hierarchy of the agency or because of his fame or notoriety as an individual. It would not be reasonable for the Federal Government to keep the files relating to millions of employees on the gamble that a historian or biographer might some day find in one of the folders the missing clue to some aspect of the life or career of an individual who later became famous. On the other hand, the National Archives can identify the folders or groups of folders, particularly those relating to employees with periods of employment prior to standardization of the folder in 1947, that may contain papers of sufficient historical importance to warrant their retention. This selection will be made prior to disposal of the remainder of the files.

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The importance of personnel folders in retirement proceedings and in determining the pension rights of former Government employees requires that the files of those covered or potentially subject to coverage by a retirement system be retained until these pension rights have been finally determined.

Retirement benefits may be obtained after varying periods of service and at various ages, but it is reasonable to assume that former employees will apply for these benefits before they are 75 years old. Consequently the retention period for the folders is set at 75 years after the employee's birth, or, if information as to date of birth is lacking, at 60 years after the date of the earliest document pertaining to his employment. Similarly, the folder may be disposed of 5 years after the death of the employee on the grounds that his retirement rights have by then been determined.

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